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Article:

Wooff, A. and Skinns, L. (2017) The role of emotion, space and place in police custody in England: Towards a geography of police custody. *Punishment and Society*. ISSN 1462-4745

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1462474517722176>

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The role of emotion, space and place in police custody in England: towards a geography of police custody

Andrew Wooff and Layla Skinns

Introduction: Geographies of police custody

Police custody is the place that people are taken once they have been arrested and whilst the police investigate allegations made against them. Carceral geography refers to ‘research into practices of incarceration, viewing such carceral spaces broadly as a type of institution whose distributional geographies, and geographies of internal and external social and spatial relations, should be explored’ (Moran, 2015: 2). As the field of carceral geography has emerged with vibrancy over the past decade (Moran, 2015; Philo, 2011; Sibley and Hoven, 2009), exploration of the nexus between the holding space of incarceration, the emotional embodiment of the environment and the micro-scale impact of incarceration on the individual have become important to understand. In particular, focusing on the multiple ways that being held in custody can impact emotionally on staff and detainees and understanding that the carceral space is itself both a space which influences and impacts on the lived experience of being in police custody.

Police custody is often conceived of as akin to a ‘miniature prison’ (see Skinns 2011, Skinns et al 2015), yet there are some distinct areas of difference between the two environments. An important difference relates to the temporality of custody; this is an environment where under the Police and Criminal Evidence Act 1984 (PACE), detainees can be held for up to 24, 36 or 96 hours depending on what they have been arrested for, but this is not routinely the case.¹ The temporal nature of police custody impacts all processes in this space; from the police coordination of the investigation and other criminal justice practitioners, ensuring that detainees are dealt with expeditiously, to the unending sense of uncertainty about time experienced by detainees.

Affect has become an important way of considering how the body interacts with space. As (Thrift, 2004) identifies, there is no stable definition of affect, however for the purposes of this paper, affect is going to focus on the role of emotion in the way that detainees and staff experience custody. In a geographical sense, the rise of affect theory has sought to challenge

¹ Under PACE, those arrested for summary offences can be detained without charge for up to 24 hours, though this can be extended to 36 hours (by a senior officer who is a superintendent or above) and to 96 hours (by a magistrate) for more serious (indictable) offences (Home Office, 2012: 37). On average, detainees are usually detained for much shorter periods than this. Skinns (2010), for example, found the average length of detention without charge to be 10 hours.

the dualisms around mind/body, space/body, subject/object, with Thrift (2004) highlighting that the mind and body are co-constituted through connections and intensities of ‘continual encounters’. Custody is a particular spatial context, however, where connections are imbued with power, a lack of explicit choice and a space where detainees’ bodies and environment are impermanent, but are affected by interactions between and with others in generating new forms of embodied materiality.

Liminality and transience are key factors in the custody environment. The notion of liminality has been successfully applied to criminal justice populations. In anthropology a liminal zone is an intermediate space, which was initially linked to rites of passage. When we travel, liminal zones also occur when we are stateless, between for example one passport control and another. Turner (1967) developed the idea of liminality as an ‘interstructural’ state in which the person is ‘betwixt and between’ socially constructed identities. When someone enters custody they are accused of committing an offence – for the time they are there, they exist in an in-between phase of being. They are captive in a space and when they emerge, decisions will be made that will affect their future – they may, for example, be charged, bailed, or released without charge – but still having gone through a space of liminality. Healy, (2010), for example, describes probationers engaged in primary desistance – that is, any form of hiatus in criminal activity as oppose to secondary and more long-term forms of desistance involving the reframing of personal identities - as “betwixt and between”. Jewkes, (2011) also uses the concept to understand life sentence prisoners, arguing that it is particularly relevant for understanding those who receive an indeterminate life sentence and who exist in a near permanent liminal state. What she also notes is that liminality can refer to states of being or states of mind (as is the case for lifers on indeterminate sentences, who are the focus of Jewkes’ chapter), as well as physical spaces (such as prison reception areas or holding bays for prison visitors), as we pass from a period of stability to one of ambiguity or undergo some kind of transformation (Jewkes, 2011: 278). In what follows the focus is on detainees’ liminal states of mind, yet police custody might also be seen as liminal space, with physical features which convey uncertainty, danger and chaos to detainees.

This paper will argue that the temporary nature of police custody is inextricably linked to the space being liminal, with people moving through custody and being caught in a loop of uncertainty. Drawing on an emerging field of scholars who have examined the role of emotions in prisons (Crewe et al., 2014; Moran, 2011), this paper explores the interaction between liminality, emotion and custody as a space of transformation and reflection. In contrast to

previous work by Crewe et al (2014), this paper highlights the key temporal nature in custody for understanding the way that emotions are embodied and expressed. The empirical material emerges from a five-year study examining what ‘good’ police custody looks like. The role of individual emotion and the transformative experience of custody is important for understanding the lived experiences of custody on detainees.

Methodology

The ‘good’ police custody study is an independent five-year national research study, the overarching aim of which is to rigorously examine what ‘good’ police custody is, taking into account recent shifts towards civilianisation and privatisation in how police custody is delivered.² In Phase 1 of the GPCS, in order to explore contemporary patterns in the delivery of police custody, data were collected in February and March 2014 from custody managers in 40 of the 43 police forces in England and Wales. They were asked about who works in, manages and owns police custody suites, as well as about who does what, how many people are annually detained in police custody and about the conditions of police custody.³ These data were used to construct a typology of police custody suites and to then select examples of some of these types of custody suites to be researched in more depth in Phase 2. It on these data that the present paper draws. Between March 2014 and May 2015, the research team collected qualitative data in four custody suites in four police forces. These were Mill City, Stone Street, Combiville and Newtown (all of which are pseudonyms). In each site, a researcher spent 3-4 weeks observing and then interviewed 10-15 staff (largely police officers, DOs but also a few other CJ practitioners) and 10-15 detainees.⁴

In total, the paper is based on 532 hours of observing and 97 interviews (47 with staff and 50 with detainees). These data were analysed thematically, picking out broad themes and sub-themes. The eleven broad themes were: the purposes of police custody; the conditions of custody; police custody workers; discretion; occupational cultures; power and suspect compliance; detainees’ responses to being detained in police custody; staff responses to working in police custody; perceptions of fairness and justice; risk; governance and accountability. The present paper focuses on a sub-section of the data on detainees’ responses

² See here for further details of the specific aims of the research

<https://www.shef.ac.uk/law/research/projects/police>

³ See Skinns et al. (2017) for further information about the findings from this survey and further explanation of the typology.

⁴ The interviews with staff and detainees were semi-structured and typically lasted 30-90 minutes.

to their detention which relates to the uncertainties they feel in police custody. See also Skinns and Wooff (forthcoming) which takes an overview of all of these data, examining it through the lens of the ‘pains of police detention’.

Custody as a temporal and liminal space of isolation

Police custody is a place of sanctioned isolation, where detainees are purposefully and legally held in separation from the public and from each other (Skinns, 2011). Places of isolation in which power differentials are inherently applicable leads to concern about the possibility that exclusionary practices might (un)intentionally increase vulnerability (Bashford and Strange, 2003). Yet people and space interact in a dynamic process; as Bashford and Strange (2003:11) note, ‘places of isolation take shape in stone and concrete, but they are also built up through relations between individuals and groups’. In other words, beyond the physical custody space itself, the power differential between detention and police officers and the detainees can lead to isolation. In social, cultural and political geography, space is not merely the backdrop, empty, contained spaces which have no power. Rather space and place determine personal experience and social practice (Sibley and Hoven, 2009), and architecture plays an active role at the micro scale for channelling, moving and impacting (up)on those in the space. In contrast to the transient indeterminable nature of affect, the physical space of custody (and architecture more generally) has often implied a sense of control, permanence, order, stability and protection, ‘tolerating only a human order that is unemotive, bounded and predictable, ignoring the vulnerable and contingent’ (Kidd, 2015: 4; Till, 2009). The physical space of custody at the micro scale therefore explicitly and implicitly interacts with those that are contained within it, deprived of their liberty.

Temporality and liminality are connected concepts, with the body being considered as carrying time – our sense of time derives, in part, from its continuous, organised nature (even in lives considered ‘disorganised’). As Goffman (1959) argues, the presentation of self is often reflected in the way that daily rhythms provide markers of the experience of the day. ‘Temporal disruption’ (Hale et al., 2010) emerges in the social care literature and describes the dislocation of the everyday routine of individuals through hospital stays. This is a helpful way of considering the period in custody, which is not only temporally disruptive, but is emotional, embodied and can end up having a transformative impact on the lives of detainees. Deprivation of certainty is linked to the way that temporality and liminality are experienced in a custody setting.

The transient and temporary nature of police custody, where detainees are uncertain but are bridging the gap between policing on the streets and courts and then prison, meant that detainees felt that they were in “limbo”. This was both in terms of the realities of being between, but also because the outcome of their spell in custody may throw their life into further liminal uncertainty, awaiting trial or fearful of the outcome of conviction. This sense of uncertainty is not captured in Sykes’ typology of the ‘pains of imprisonment’ (Skinns and Wooff, forthcoming).

Liminality and uncertainty are closely linked. This was frequently described as one of the more upsetting parts of the custody experience, with ‘being in limbo’ used as a way of describing the experience: MC_DET4 described himself as being in ‘limbo’ in police custody because he was waiting whilst the police decided whether to charge him, or remand him and then send him to court. He said: it ‘[p]isses me off when you’re just left in limbo and it’s not only me that’s feeling it, it’s my mum ... and obviously the missus and everything, and they just keep you in limbo’. The potential impact of the uncertainty of police custody is highlighted by SS_Det_1:

‘It’s that thing, been put in a situation where you don’t know what’s going to happen and I was concerned about [...] I was concerned about that. I was concerned that my partner wanted to know I was okay and not physically damaged to any great extent and then I was concerned not knowing how long things would go on, sort of whether I would be detained overnight which was something that I didn’t particularly want to spend the night in police cells. So I suppose it was that fear of the unknown really...’

As a first time offender, the whole experience was a bit of an unknown one. The impact of his arrest on his family and being disconnected from them physically and virtually (see Skinns and Wooff (forthcoming) for discussion on the deprivation of liberty in police custody). The deprivation of instantaneous social media and messaging contact can create an added layer of uncertainty and distress for the detainee, reinforcing and underlying the predicament that they find themselves in. This separation, both physical and emotional, links to time and the physical actions of the custody suite. In particular detainees felt ‘gutted’ and ‘frightened’ and upset when the cell doors shut because they did not know how long they would be there (SS_DET3, SS_DET10, SS_DET11, NT_DET4, CV_DET9).

This was not helped by the fact that, as noted above, one of the material goods detainees were deprived of in police custody was a clock or a watch so they had no way of gauging what time it was, when they had arrived, how long they had been there etc. When staff tell detainees how long it will be until they are released, without a clock, detainees struggle to be able to tell how

long has elapsed. Deprivation of liberty is therefore equated to the notion that time itself is removed from detainees.

The custody environment itself further contributed to uncertainties about the passage of time, with little light penetrating the custody suite, especially in Stone Street:

'when you look at more modern custody suites we are a bit of a nightmare. We have no natural light, the cells are appalling really dark and dingy and yeah there's not a lot positive to say about it to be fair.' (SS_CS1)

This was also true of the cells, many of which had no or limited natural light; detainees were held in these conditions sometimes for long periods of time on their own. Consequently, detainees frequently asked staff the time by using the cell buzzer, otherwise, detainees' only sense of time was derived from when meals were delivered and when routine checks were performed. As PACE requires, these checks occur at a minimum of every hour, but can be up to every fifteen minutes for detainees who are considered at higher risk. In many ways these checks reminded the detainee that they were still being held and emphasised the (usually) slow speed at which time was passing. The routinized, timed, everyday practices of the detention officer carrying out checks contrasted with the lack of awareness of time by the detainee:

'For me, the protocol [for meals] is set times. Now, from my personal point of view I haven't got an issue if I'm busy or if there's only a few in then it's on an issue, anytime. I aint really got an issue whether I say yes or no to a prisoner unless I've checked record and he's had one every hour, that's just ridiculous' (SS_DO4)

Additionally, the time that the detainee spent in custody was often unstructured, with little reading material and therefore time passed even more slowly:

'we had in yesterday...teenager... fourteen... and said he I'm bored so I got some magazines.. and yeah they were what my mother sent in, women's magazines, but he were quite happy sitting reading them and it passed some time on so it's kept him happy and it's stopped him kicking on cell door and peeling paint of the wall ant it...' (SS_DO2)

Thus, while detainees were uncertain about the passage of time, paradoxically, time structures a great deal in custody, particularly from the perspective of staff. The PACE codes of practice dictate, for example, the length of time someone is allowed to be held in custody without charge, how often someone should be checked, when they should have their meals and how long a detainee can exercise for. A number of aspects of the job of custody staff therefore are structured around the 'PACE clock' – when detainees have been checked, how long they have left on their clock, the time at which detention was authorised. This is even more apparent in

custody suites classed as ‘predominantly private’ (Skinns et al., 2015), where private sector targets structure time even more stringently, as a result of key performance indicators which measure the time taken by private security staff to book-in detainees. Therefore, particularly in the predominantly private suites, uncertainties about the passage of time, was a further reminder, alongside other things (such as the removal of personal effects, the sometimes towering booking-in desk, the isolation of the cells), of the powerless status of detainees relative to the police.

The foregoing analysis suggests that liminality and temporality in police custody are dynamic, embodied and are inherently related to the emotional expressions in police custody. Different physical spaces of custody facilitate emotions in differing, complex and embedded ways. Part of this relates to being in a state of timelessness and limbo, between the life before arrest and the likely but unknown life after police custody ends. The way emotion is embodied in the custody suite therefore becomes a central narrative for how uncertainty is managed.

Custody as a space of emotion

Understanding custody as a space of emotion requires a consideration of the way that emotion in space has been theorised. In geography, a large body of work has examined the role of emotions and embodiment. Jayne et al., (2010: 544) for example explores the embodied impact of alcohol and drunkenness, arguing that ‘emotions both reside in bodies and places and exist as relational flows, fluxes and currents, in between people and places’. Longhurst (2001) makes the point that bodily boundaries are transgressed in emotionally powerful and disruptive environs. Custody is a one of those environments which is emotionally charged and where dynamics mean the individual is part of what Venn (2010: 146) terms the ‘dynamic mobile system’.

Aside for the uncertainties of how long they would be in police custody and what the likely criminal justice outcome would be, detainees’ emotional responses were also uncertain and changeable. This fluidity of emotion was linked to prior experiences of the police custody environment. CV_DET4 said, for example, that when she was arrested on the occasion that the researcher met her she felt “oh no, not again”, whilst on her first ever arrest she felt “devastated”. The importance of time and the impact of unknown outcomes on detainees, the complex nature of the needs of detainees, including intoxication, and the concomitantly unknown risks posed by detainees, further contributed to transient and changeable emotional responses to police custody, particularly when being booked-in. For example, a female detainee

went from being in an okay mood whilst staff conducted the risk assessment to being “crazed and incensed in a split second” after being asked about self-harm which resulted in her being taken directly to the cells (CV_Obs_29.6.14). Similarly, a detainee who was suspected of having taken methadone went from being “unintelligible ... to calm and talking, to getting riled up again within half an hour” (CV_Obs_23.7.14). Emotional uncertainty therefore becomes a key part of the custody environment, both for detainees and for staff.

As Crewe et al., (2014) argue in a prison setting, emotions should be considered in a dynamic, multi-layered manner. Crewe et al., (2014) describe the complexities associated with micro-geographies of emotions in a prison setting, but as described above, custody is time limited. The liminality and temporality of custody intertwine with the inebriated state of many of the detainees when they are initially brought into the custodial environment, adding further vacillations to their emotional responses, particularly at the charge desk. As Jayne et al., (2010: 549) notes, ‘drunkenness is a psychoactive sociality, that involves an assemblage of embodied and emotional, affective and material human interactions’. The following excerpt from the researcher’s field notes encapsulates the uncertain nature of detainee’s emotions:

There was a woman brought in – she was very happily drunk. She was brought in for theft. She had been in hospital recently, had a head injury and suffered from depression. She then got quite upset and started saying that she wasn’t a ‘murder-ess’. She started crying. She says that she needs help and the custody sergeant said that they could get her help, that they have many provisions in place. ... She turned to the officer and said “you don’t understand” he said “no, I don’t, I’m not in your position, but I’m listening and we can get you the help you need” ... They got back to the risk assessment and she reverted to laughing again but then she started talking about the possibility of her ending up homeless – emotionally she was up and down and the officers had to, and did, respond to this accordingly (MC_Obs_21.4.14)

This quote highlights the uncertainty created by custody, where staff in some instances try to calm detainees by managing expectations and by offering to listen to detainees - this is an important part of their care and welfare role. From a staffing point of view, understanding the degree to which detainees’ emotions are an embodied performance or ‘a risk’ requiring a practical and sometimes immediate response, needs to be assessed and managed expediently. For example, in Stone Street, a custody officer described having to make make split second decisions during the initial risk assessment process on whether someone was an ‘oscar winner’ or a ‘pension killer’. That is, they had to decide whether the detainee was ‘performing’ to gain some form of leverage over staff or whether the detainee was requiring a response by staff,

such as some kind of medical intervention – getting this wrong could result in a death in custody and a custody officer being investigated, disciplined, fired and possibly even held criminally responsible.

From a detainee point of view, the performativity and the embodied emotions they displayed in police custody could be a way of exerting some degree of control over their situation, as well as helping them to cope. For this detainee ‘letting it all out’ was a way of coping with the sense of shame he felt, but also the pain he felt at being separated from his family:

‘So I’ve got mental problems, they wouldn’t give me my own tablets. And then I kept buzzing because I was missing my kids, I was getting very upset, and I just let it all out. I knew my head were going to blow, and they just weren’t bothered, and I then I never pressed it all night. Because I’d been in for drink they must have thought, oh yeah, do you know what I mean? No, I actually wanted help. I was trying to ask for them, but they just didn’t care. Scared, I’ll admit, and I get... and ashamed, but the last thing you want is people being horrible, when you’ve got mental problems as well’ (SS_Det5)

As argued thus far, fluctuations in the emotional responses of detainees to being in custody depend on a range of circumstances associated with the mental health, intoxication, and experience of being in custody. The physical space of custody impacts on the embodied emotions of those within it; the custody environment is austere and noisy, which some detainees, such as this first-timer found intimidating::

‘It intimidated me a little bit when I went in because I’ve never been in that environment before so I didn’t know what to expect’ (Detainee_SS10)

In particular, this first-time detainee found the physical space of the charge desk intimidating. In this suite, the desk was raised, meaning that staff were situated above eye level. This design is common-place as it is meant to aid the safety of staff who are less easily assaulted,⁵ but the design also sends a message about the control and power in the custody suite, a message which is not lost on detainees (Skinns, 2011).

In some ways Crewe et al’s (2014) study on emotion zones in prison is useful for considering how micro-scale emotions in police custody are linked to the physical environment, with different emotions being expressed in different zones. In particular, the charge desk appeared to elicit a greater degree of emotional outpouring and performance than the more ‘private’/backstage zones of the corridors and the cells. At the charge desk, expressions of

⁵ The Home Office have a set of guidelines for architecture and building standards across the police custody estate. It is available here:
<https://www.thenbs.com/PublicationIndex/documents/details?Pub=HOMOFF&DocID=296858>

anger, frustration, anguish and aggression were not uncommon. This was primarily because, although police custody is considered a ‘backstage’ area of policing Skinns et al., (2017), the charge desk represents the most public area of the suite. It is here that charging decisions, risk assessments and release are conducted. Depending on the detainee, this may have required subverting inner anger in order to appear ‘level-headed’, in the hope of achieving better bail conditions. The cell, however, tended to provide an area of reflection and a degree of privacy emotionally (even though many are now monitored by CCTV):

‘The fact that you’re behind a door and you know you’ve fucked up basically, and that’s what’s most upsetting I think.’ (SS_Det2)

‘I mean the minute you walk through them doors, it’s like, well this is how I feel. Like, you’re scared for your life. You want time to pass so you can go home and when I, personally when I go through the doors to get checked and go to the cell, I regret what I’ve done, before I’ve got to them doors. And I sit there and I beg and plead, can I please go, I won’t... do you know what I mean, but then I understand that it’s out of my hands. That it’s not up to me no more.’ (NT_Det4)

These accounts from detainees highlight the emotional realisation of being locked in a cell and the emotional impact that the physical act of closing the door had on detainees. The feeling of helplessness and despair along with the realisation of what has happened tended to be the primary responses of detainees once in their cells. In a fairly blunt way, then, emotion zones are useful for thinking about how the physical space of police custody interacts with the embodiment of emotions in police custody. However there are a number of reasons why emotion zones are less apt in a custody setting than in prison.

Firstly, custody is a more controlled environment than prisons, with detainees not being allowed any time out of their cell, unsupervised, meaning limited relationality and interactivity between detainees, unlike for prisoners, as described by Crewe et al., (2014).⁶ Secondly, the immediacy of custody after the arrest mean that embodied emotions related to the case are fresh and there is still a range of potential outcomes that could emerge from the investigation. Being in this liminal zone, where decisions are still being made which will impact on the future direction of the lifecourse of detainees, means that emotional performativity can matter more in a custody environment. Decisions about whether to charge, bail or release an individual are still in the process of being made in police custody, There is still a chance of those pathways being altered at this point, so (non)performativity

⁶ Detainees can and do shout between the cells to hold conversations with one and other, with this being a one source of noise in the custody suite.

in various ways is used as a way of detainees demonstrating a desire for quick decisions to be made. Additionally, detainees are still innocent in the eyes of the law at this point. Thirdly, the temporality of custody means that many of the activities Crewe identifies do not occur in custody. For example, whilst some of the ‘emotional microclimate’ of the visit room in prison is perhaps evident in locations such as the nurses room in custody or in the self-reflection that detainees engage in in the cells (Skinns and Wooff, forthcoming), the reality is that emotion in custody relates more to the anger and shock of being caught, compared to missing relatives as experienced by those in prison.

These differences are important to consider because it links the context of custody to the micro-level emotions being experienced in custody environment. Custody has been conceived of as a quasi-prison, but the foregoing analysis suggests that these micro-scale emotions differ in their form and origin in police custody settings. As we discuss next, compared to prison, they also require different coping strategies to manage these emotions.

Emotion management

The regulation and management of emotions is important for understanding the ways that detainees navigate custody. As Laws and Crewe (2016) note, emotion regulation in prison life is important. They draw attention to the fact that the emotions of prisoners are modifiable in a number of different ways and are influenced by the environment in which they occur. This suggests that understanding the complex ways that emotions interact in space and are therefore managed both by the environment and staff becomes a central to understanding police custody.

Emotion management manifests itself in prisons with respect to where and when prisoners regulate their emotions. As Laws and Crewe (2016: 536) note, there are different ways that people attempt to modify their emotions, with prisoners exercising ‘a degree of autonomy over both where and when they experience particular emotions’ (emphasis in the original). They identify different ways that emotions are managed by prisoners, including through situation modification, attention deployment and cognitive change. It is useful to reflect on how each of these may be relevant to the way that detainees in police custody attempt to manage their emotions.

Situation modification and attention deployment refer to customising the physical environment to fit a particular purpose and distracting oneself from unpleasant emotions,

respectively. Laws and Crewe (2016) note the significant changes that prisoners make in relation to their cell, including hanging art and playing music. Again, however, the temporality of custody means that these dimensions of emotion management are not as readily available to detainees in police custody. We might regard the graffiti that appears from time-to-time in cells as one aspect of this (Skinns et al., 2015); on the whole, though, the means for this are not readily available to detainees in the cells and such behaviour is strongly discouraged through fines and other punishments. Cognitive change and response modulation, however, are more applicable to the police custody context.

Cognitive change refers to the ways that we ‘reappraise or transform’ how we think of specific situations (Laws and Crewe, 2016: 538). This work has traction when considering prison space. However, it is also a useful way of examining the ways that police custody can be considered transformative emotionally. In line with the literature which considers custody as a quasi-prison (Skinns, 2011), this aspect of emotion management mirrors what Laws and Crewe (2016) found in prison, albeit on a lesser and more transient scale. Emotional realisation tends to happen at the charge desk, whilst cognitive change and a more contemplative mood tends to happen when in the cell.

AW: So on Saturday how did you feel when you first arrived in Police custody and did that change throughout the time?

Oh I was devastated. I was devastated because I thought I was staying for two days. I was really devastated. It started, well it eased off a little bit when I was talking to the Sergeant but then when I had to go in the cell while they were sorting the paper work out for the interview and everything it was even worse, the fact I was sitting in that cell, the room just felt like it was closing in on us and I was like I am going to be here 2 days, 2 days of this, sitting in this poxy room and then I started to cry, *I was like I don't believe this, over like £23 of so called meat... if you sleep through the day you are not going to sleep at night and if you are having withdrawals its bad to sleep to start with and then if everyone bangs, so really it's just a matter of putting your head under the blanket and just hoping the time will pass, that's why I think like I say you should be offered reading material even like, I don't know print crosswords off, do you know like do crosswords or something like that like because in jail you get like in cell activities for them who are a bit loco, you know like if they have like mental health issues and that and they can't stand being boxed in* (NT_Det_11).

Interestingly, this detainee notes the differences in custody compared to prison; in most of our interviews, detainees talked about the stark realisation of the custody environment where the cells offer no comfort.

Humour, however, is a useful mechanism for cognitive reframing. Some of the detainees discussed humour as a way of getting on with staff in custody and helping time to pass more quickly:

‘I just try and chat to people, have a bit of chat and a bit of banter. I like to talk and have a laugh and it makes me feel more at ease type of thing, yeah.’
(Detainee_NT2)

It may also be a way of exerting some power over the situation, with some detainees considering ‘banter’ as a way of improving the likely outcomes of police custody, such as a more timely release.⁷

Beyond the cognitive change experienced by detainees in custody, staff also recognised the cell as a space where emotions could be more effectively managed and they thus used the cells as a space for detainees to change their emotional state:

‘If they going to get charged they get a charge, if they are being violent they are not coming out the cell. It is that black and white down here ’ (Nt_sergeant1)

‘And its getting that balance of in control but equally trying to get out of the detainee in a controlled fashion, the risks, you know, rather than some people, as soon as *you start oh fuck you, cell, that’s it you have had one chance, you know, whereas others will let them go on and go on and with a prisoner, if you don’t control, they start to perform, you know and to realise I’ve not having me wings clipped here and they will suddenly start what?...*’ (Nt_sergeant3)

The cell in these cases was used as a ‘cooling off’ space, where detainees were left if they were violent, un-cooperative or too incoherent through drink or drugs to be dealt with immediately. That is, the cells were used to encourage a cognitive and emotional change in detainees.

Understanding emotions in a custody environment is important for helping staff to identify those at risk of self-harm within custody but also once they leave. This is particularly true when a detainee is charged with an offence which may have life-changing effects. Although

⁷ Humour was also a tool of ‘soft’ power for the police, being used to secure compliance with police procedures such as fingerprinting and photographing detainees (Skinns, Rice, et al., 2017)

not technically guilty at this point, certain offences (such as rape) may still carry with them life changing implications connected to stigma, which are hard to erase even if they are subsequently found not guilty.

Emotional ‘aftershocks’ of police custody

The concept of emotional liminality is more commonly applied in health and education settings (eg Atkinson and Robson, 2012), however, conceptually it has traction when applied to police custody. In particular, more recent conceptualisations of liminality argue that ‘managing liminality involves balancing the ingridity and permeability of boundaries’ (ibid: 1350). When thinking about emotions and the fairly impermeable custody walls, it is important to consider the lasting impacts, emotionally, of the police custody environment. With legitimacy a key cornerstone of policing, the emotional journey of detainees in the suite may potentially impact on future relationships with the police, as well as affecting whether detainees regard themselves as valued members of society (Jackson et al., 2012). As such it is important that the police consider the the emotional fragility of detainees, not just in terms of risks following release from custody but also in terms of their future relationships with the police and with wider society.

The outcome of a spell in custody can be no further action, charge and bail, bail whilst further investigations are undertaken or charge and remand to prison. For those who are bailed to return at a later date, the emotions and uncertainties of police custody can bleed into other parts of an their life. For example, accusations of particular offences could lead to being suspended from employment or the breakdown of relationships. The relatively short timeframe associated with custody and the longterm emotional consequences of this are an important consideration for police staff when considering risk and vulnerability. Much like Barnett's (2002) work, which examines the impact of a life changing medical diagnosis on patient perceptions of doctors, the way the release from police custody is managed can also have an impact on detainees. In particular, feelings of being in limbo and and fluctuations in emotions may continue for many months, until a more certain trajectory is established (ie. the case gets dropped, goes to court or is resolved in another manner):

‘You feel mad with yourself. I mean it’s easy to think that on reflection, but at the time you just think, well I need a bit of money, let’s do it. It’s, get yourself slightly off your face, psyche yourself up, I love it, but just hope you don’t get caught’ (SS_det3)

This detainee highlights the mixed emotions involved in an offending trajectory. The way that custody becomes more than a stand alone experience or static environment, a space that is potentially continually being made as a result of the embodied and emotional tremors of those passing through it, is important for thinking about the emotional ‘aftershocks’ of this short period of time.

A useful way of framing the temporality of custody and impact on subsequent everyday life is through the concept of stigma. Stigma is generally understood to convey a sense of disgrace, based on an attribute which may be discrediting. It is attributed to bodily subjectivities, where people inscribe a moral and culturally negative stereotype on someone, based on societal norms (Moran, 2014). Being arrested can impact on a number of levels emotionally; thinking about the emotional inscription of custody, there is an impact:

‘I’m happy that I am in and out in 2 hours and nobody is none the wiser, from my point of view. Work don’t need to know what it was all about, because it’s only a caution it doesn’t need to be recorded for work purposes... You only have to disclose it if it says Police caution, reprimand, whatever. So yeah I was more relieved at the point of which they said its going to be a caution because it could have been £80 fixed penalty and that was point of me nicking the fucking Sat Nav’ (Detainee_Nt5)

This individual was a police officer and so getting caught stealing was an embarrassment, professionally, and it was important to him to keep his time in custody hidden from his employer and family.

The blurring of inside/outside of carceral spaces has been written about in relation to prisons, with the physical embodied inscriptions of prison life often ‘becoming corporeal markers of imprisonment (see Moran (2014) for a discussion on the embodied impacts of tattoos and other forms of inscription). Although the physical and mental scars associated with a spell in prison may be deeper, given the much briefer spells that detainees spend in police custody, arguably police custody also marks the start of such a journey. The short timescales of police custody combined with some of the embodied emotions, already discussed, mean that police custody marks the beginning of the much deeper physical and mental scarring. For some, police custody may be the beginning of a deeper engagement with the criminal justice system and associated liminal, transient and insecure relationships with the police and other criminal justice actors.

For others, however, their first and only experience of police custody may have had an emotional impact that stayed with them long after their arrest. For example, this detainee said:

'You remember your first time in custody, I do anyway, it was frightening and horrible. The thought makes me tense up' (Detainee_SS3)

In another example, the emotional impact of police detention started when this first-time detainee was arrested, as a result of the way he and other protestors were arrested:

'[Custody] itself, apart from being physically painful, was quite emotionally disturbing. To see people that I knew who could barely stand on their feet, some of them were blind people been skitted all over...I was conscious of speaking quietly and calming...was determined to make sure that I wouldn't do anything that they could afterwards construe as behaviour that justified them using violence against me' (Detainee_SS1)

This type of reaction by detainees to their detention may encourage desistance from future offending, though this is also likely to depend on the degree to which detainees feel that their arrest was legitimate. Additionally, by understanding and considering the emotional impacts of bailing and charging decisions, the police can begin to assess the risk and potential vulnerability of those being released.

Conclusion: Towards a geography of police custody

This paper offers insights into the geographies of police custody. Although there is increasing literature on carceral geographies (Moran, 2011; 2015), there is very little written on the space of police custody. This paper has argued that the emotions of detainees are fundamentally impacted by the temporal and liminal nature of the custody experience. Literature on police custody is often uncritically linked to the prisons literature. However, by drawing on Laws and Crewe's (2016) work, we have shown the ways that emotion differs in police custody settings compared to work carried out in prisons. We have argued that the uncertainties of the police custody environment, where detainees felt in "limbo" as it was unclear what was going to happen to them and when meant that over the short time-scales in police custody, emotions were changeable and uncertain, fluctuating as a result of their level of inebriation and prior experiences of police custody, for example. These emotions were also intertwined with and affected by the physical space of police custody, particularly with different spaces in the suite. The charge desk, for example, was a place in which it was not uncommon to see emotional outpourings and aggression, which contrasted with the self-reflection and privacy of emotions

that were more characteristic of detainees' experiences of the cells. Although this echoes some of the prisons literature, the relative lack of freedom and immediacy of time since arrest, led to a slightly different emotional architecture compared to that found in prisons.

Understanding the emotional aftershocks of custody is important. In a variety of ways, experiences of police custody may have a lasting effect on detainees' lives. For example, the sense of being in 'limbo' may continue for long periods, if a detainee is bailed whilst further investigations are carried out. In addition, for first-time detainees, their experiences of police custody may be so emotionally charged that it leaves a lasting impact on them. Whilst for those who are multiply arrested, detention in the custody suite may mark the start of deeper physical and emotional scars, particularly if police custody is the start of a deeper engagement with the criminal justice system. Although this paper has focused on the effects of time and space within custody, the social structures (e.g ethnicity, age, socio-economic status and gender) outside of custody are also important in consideration of the longer term impacts of being arrested and kept in a custody suite.

The physical and emotional space(s) of police custody therefore, are shaped by both the immediate impact of the arrest and time spent in police custody, along with the subsequent emotional transformation and potentially longer term impact on a detainees life. Understanding some of the complexity here has important implications for considering police legitimacy and supporting detainees once they have left custody. Understanding the geography of police custody, the way(s) that emotions vary depending on the physical space and the impact of liminal and temporal processes, facilitates a deeper understanding of the emotional aftershocks of being detained. In order to do this, it is important to understand the micro-scale, lived experience of those in the police custody environment.

Acknowledgments:

This work was supported by the Economic and Social Research Council (ES/J023434/1). We also wish to thank Amy Sprawson and Lindsey Rice who assisted with the data collection and some of the data analysis on which this paper is based, as well as all those who participated in the study. We would also like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments, as well as those who commented on an earlier version of this paper presented at the Carceral Geography Conference at the University of Birmingham in December 2016.

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